

SIDNEY'S LOVE AFFAIR.

BY WALTON S. SMITH.

PART II.—Continued.

With a pang, the jealous observer saw his friend rise to his full height, more than six feet in his boots, and bend his stately head in graceful salutation. In spite of himself, it came to him that these two were made for each other. They both made such a picture of youth and beauty and health. Frank, with the light playing on his golden locks, without the customary grin to mar the chiselled outline of his features, his blue eyes full of deep expression, was a sight no young girl might look on unmoved. And Miss Caldwell smiled on him as she returned his bow; when she raised her head it was to peer shyly at him again with appreciative eyes. And moreover there was less of the dreamy contemplation in those eyes now!

Sidney groaned miserably.

"What chance has five feet five, ugly and fat, against six feet of robust symmetry, in the regard of a young girl?" he mused sadly. Alas poor Sidney!

Then he cursed under his breath as the hopeless answer came. And he slipped from the room through another window that was conveniently near. He strode hastily along the verandah and thence to a terraced walk commanding a view of the river. Leaning his elbows on a railing that was there, he gazed out over the scene, but said nothing.

The evening breeze blew up from the water, cool and refreshing; the sun was well down in the west; and the birds were singing, but not so merrily as an hour ago. For the twilight approached and the night was to follow with its peace and stillness.

My hero remained there but a few minutes, long enough for his feelings to resume something akin to their normal state. Naturally erratic and impulsive, he was liable to act strangely. But in the end his conceit, a predominant feature in his character, asserted its sway. Nature is truly an all thoughtful dispenser! She seldom fails to provide those whose personal appearance is their sore point with a reserve supply of self-confidence wherewith to soothe the wounded sensibilities.

"Is it right that one man should be thought more of than another because forsooth his face and form are more pleasing?" asked Sidney rebelliously. He frowned into space a moment, then went on more composedly.

"But still—would I change places with Frank Merton? Would I barter my brains for his beauty or my culture for his muscle? Ah! which of us will be the better man a score of years hence? Which the most admired and famous? I, Sidney March, of course."

And he threw a pebble viciously down at a staid old gander waddling peacefully along the path at the base of the wall on which the terrace was. Then, feeling somewhat relieved in mind, he returned to the house.

Mrs. Peyton, who had entered meanwhile, came forward and playfully lectured him for his desertion. "Star gazing before sunset Sidney—you require looking after!" and she eyed him quizzically.

"Cares of business, nervous prostration, subject to sudden fits of—" and he wound up by an unintelligible murmur. He saw Miss Smiling listening, and realized it would not be advisable to account

for his desertion by stating, as he had intended, that he was subject to sudden fits of the blues.

"I hope you enjoyed the view," said the hostess. "I looked out a moment ago and you were on the terrace staring fixedly at something on the path beneath. I did not disturb you because I knew you would give us the result of your reverie. What is it, pray?"

And she stood before him with an air of mock entreaty.

"It was not a reverie," said Sidney shortly. Then he roused himself and went on impressively. "But there was an old gander on that path and his actions gave me much food for abstract speculation. He was very white and very dignified. I observed with admiration the regal air that was in his swaying gait. And I felt somehow it must be an important errand that called forth such a dignitary—something perhaps in which the welfare of a large clan of geese and goslings was nearly concerned. And as I watched him he stopped, deliberated a moment, then pecked vigorously at his left wing. Beautiful sight to note the instantaneous transition from pompous motion to perfect repose and thence to excited action—from the concerns of the commonwealth to those of the toilet. Couldn't help thinking his conduct rather frivolous though, so I even chucked a stone at him and came away."

Sidney finished his speech and looked gravely about him at his smiling audience. And for the first time he became aware that there were other people in the room who had entered, presumably, during his short absence. Mrs. Peyton laid her hand on his arm—"Let me introduce you to the Caldwells," she whispered, and he was accordingly led up and presented to the strangers.

Mrs. Caldwell was a kind, sweet-voiced old lady with an accent unmistakably English. In young Mr. Caldwell he recognized the man whom Frank and he had seen a few hours previously, the male performer in the tableaux of youth and love—the ardent boy in fact. And so she was his sister. Sidney felt so elated that he made bold to smile when presented to that sister. And he was about to sink into a seat beside her, when the servant entered to announce that tea was waiting.

That was an unsatisfactory meal for poor Sidney. The object of his regard was seated far away from him. Young Caldwell hedged her off on one side, and her mother on the other. Sidney felt that it was a clumsy arrangement, and he marvelled that the hostess should countenance it. Ordinarily, she was quick to arrange for the comfort of her guests. And now he was obliged to listen to Miss Smiling's inane talk and to minister to the many wants of Mrs. Cowan. He felt that life was full of trials. Time was when he had not found Miss Smiling uninteresting. But he was too low-spirited to exert himself. He even forgot to feel maliciously pleased that Frank had been placed at the head of the table where he was far removed from the lady of his choice. With unaccustomed dullness he had failed to note that this had been manœuvred by Miss Smiling herself. That young lady had not forgiven Mr. Merton for his behaviour when Miss Caldwell was introduced to him. She did not know the true inwardness of the matter, and as yet Merton had had no chance to inform her. So she availed her-

self of Sidney's preoccupied state, and, by dint of adroit management, contrived to oust Frank from the privilege of sitting by her. Mrs. Peyton had intended Sidney to take the head of the table; he was a connection and one who could, when he chose, fill the position admirably. But the meal was a very informal one; each guest sat pretty much where he or she chanced to come to a halt on entering. This small conspiracy on the part of the offended young lady was by no means a decided success. It was rather the contrary; for instead of having Frank near at hand, all attention to serve her and to amuse her, she had the very shell of a man. One whose mind was not one whit intent on his duty, whose every sense was on the alert watching another girl.

And that big-boned, ruddy faced young Caldwell persisted in thrusting himself forward so as to shut off his view! Alack, we all have our crosses to bear! Sidney did not take kindly to his; he paid small attention to Mrs. Cowan and treated Miss Smiling's remarks with scant courtesy. Fortunately, though, they were old friends; and, as such, well used to his ways. They merely exchanged meaningless smiles, and allowed him to continue as unsociable as he pleased. Sidney's whimsical nature was a byword amongst his friends; none of them dreamed of taking offence at treatment from him which, from another, would have met with the hottest resentment. For, despite his odd ways and fantastic effervescence he was at heart good. And withal he was a general favourite.

Both Sidney and Frank were inveterate cigarette smokers, and at no time does the desire for the weed come upon one so strongly as after a meal. When the former came up to his friend with an appealing look, he was met directly with the question:—

"Got any cigarettes, old man?"

Sidney groaned. "Not one. Left mine in the boat. You might run down and get them," he said hesitatingly. "They will be in the stern somewhere—sure to be in the stern; you cannot miss them," he added persuasively.

But Frank only laughed. He well knew that his friend must have a smoke or die; and he was also aware that he, personally, was not inclined to march down to the boathouse to procure that which would be brought to him by another if he only had a little patience.

The end was that Sidney, with rage in his heart, was obliged to tramp down himself.

"That villain Frank shall not have one," he vowed, as he selected one from the case and lighted it. He threw himself upon the grass by the bank of the river to enjoy the luxury in which he was delighted. And he chuckled selfishly as he conjured up a vision of his friend's anxious expectation. "Do him good to wait awhile!" he assured himself.

But, as he lay there in the light of the setting sun, his mind reverted again to Miss Caldwell. Strange that this girl, with whom he had as yet exchanged but a conventional smile, should influence him so. Surely it was not an ordinary thing! And, surely it was sweet to think of her. What eyes she had! How shy she seemed, and yet, for all that, so perfectly at ease. And there was an interesting melancholy in her expression—although,